

Rescued from the River: Attempted Suicide in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris

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This article, focused on ordinary men and women who attempted to drown themselves in the Seine in 1779, illustrates the problems and rewards involved in researching suicide in a variety of complementary sources, published and unpublished, produced by municipal officials and social commentators in eighteenth-century Paris. These sources allow us to hear the voices of individuals who tried to end their lives in the river and to see how others recorded and reported their stories. The article reads the sources comparatively and contextually, with a look at attempted suicides in the Thames around the same time.

Axé sur des hommes et des femmes ordinaires qui ont tenté de se noyer dans la Seine en 1779, le présent article illustre les difficultés et les récompenses inhérentes à la recherche sur le suicide dans diverses sources complémentaires, publiées ou non, produites par les autorités municipales et les commentateurs sociaux à Paris au XVIII^e siècle. Ces sources nous permettent d'entendre les voix d'individus qui ont tenté de mettre fin à leurs jours en se jetant à l'eau et de voir comment d'autres ont consigné ou relaté leurs récits. L'article propose une lecture des sources comparative et contextuelle, qui s'accompagne d'un regard sur les tentatives de suicide dans la Tamise vers la même époque.

RESEARCH ON SUICIDE in early modern Europe over the last few decades has both followed and broadened the agenda defined by sociologists from Emile Durkheim to Jack Douglas.¹ Following Durkheim, we explore patterns in the sex, age, family background, marital status, and occupations of victims, in methods of self-destruction, and in daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly numbers, not to mention in the motives involving social problems and conflicts. Following Douglas, we explore meanings in the words and deeds of those who killed themselves, in the accounts of their lives and deaths provided by friends, neighbours, and relatives, and in the reports of the authorities who investigated and adjudicated the cases. As historians, we read the patterns and meanings of self-inflicted death within the

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1 For a now dated but still useful review of the historiography, see Róisín Healy, "Suicide in Early Modern and Modern Europe," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2006), pp. 903-919.

broader framework of questions about urban order and public welfare, privacy and liberty, medicalization and secularization. Our ability to address the smaller and larger issues, of course, depends more than anything else on the nature and contents of the extant sources. We have different classes of sources from different locales and therefore different degrees of access to the experience and representations of intended, attempted, and completed suicide in different times and places. This article, largely focused on one method of attempted suicide in one time and place, is intended to explicate the uses and limits of an array of complementary sources, recorded by municipal officials and Parisian commentators, and to illustrate the advantages of reading them synchronically. It does not constitute an encyclopaedic microhistory of suicide in the capital in 1779, but it does demonstrate why research on this or any other year must follow multiple, parallel and intersecting, avenues of inquiry.

Historians have used an impressive and instructive variety of published and unpublished sources to explore patterns and meanings of suicide in eighteenth-century France, but more sources remain to be located and digested.² Theologians, jurists, and *philosophes* debated the moral and legal issues in many genres. Parisians lamented the incidence of suicide and recounted examples in letters, journals, and *nouvelles* (collections of news and gossip circulated in manuscript and in some cases later printed). A French officer informed a Swedish correspondent in 1780 that “les malheureux, abandonnés des magistrats qui devraient les secourir, se jettent dans la Seine, s’empoisonnent ou se pendent en maudissant les gens en place.” A year later he reported that a cotton merchant who removed his hat, made the sign of the cross, and jumped off the Pont Neuf was “heureusement” rescued and revived in one of the guardposts along the river.³ The printer Hardy recorded 41 attempted and 218 completed suicides, 62 of them in the Seine, in his remarkable journal of events in the city between 1764 and 1789. He noted that one man retrieved from the water asked defensively “quel mal il avoit fait,” and another wondered nervously “si il auroit quelque peine à subir.”⁴ District police commissioners questioned and released both of them. The papers of the 48 commissioners document more suicides than any other source, but they are organized in 48 separate chronological series, and they are not indexed in any way. Researchers may track down cases by collecting names, dates, and streets from Hardy and other sources or by working their way through cartons of interfiled reports about everything from domestic violence to chamber pots emptied out windows. Research on several sample years has unearthed many examples. A girl rescued from the river in 1750 admitted that she had decided “de s’y jeter pour y

2 For sources, patterns, and issues, see Dominique Godineau, *S’abrégé les jours : le suicide en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012); Jeffrey Merrick, “Patterns and Prosecution of Suicide in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 1-53.

3 *Lettres de M. de Kaganeck, brigadier des gardes du corps, au baron Alströmer*, ed. L. Léuzon de Le Duc (Paris: G. Charpentier et C^{ie}, 1884), p. 165 (August 9, 1780) and p. 360 (October 28, 1781). The Pont Neuf crosses the western end of the Île de la Cité and connects the Left and Right Banks.

4 Bibliothèque National [hereafter BN], Siméon Prosper Hardy, “Mes loisirs, ou Journal d’événements tels qu’ils parviennent à ma connaissance,” Fonds Français 6681, p. 69 (June 2, 1772), and 6683, p. 269 (March 19, 1780).

périr,” and a woman arrested for trying to drown herself in 1770 insisted “qu’elle n’a jamais eu l’intention de le faire.”⁵

Given the multiplicity of jurisdictions and authorities in the capital, attempted suicides are documented in other archival series as well.⁶ The 12 months of extant records of the 10 *commissaires* of the Bureau de la Ville, who had jurisdiction over the Seine and its banks, include 10 suicides (nine attempted and one completed) in the river in 1779.⁷ When summoned to the guardposts along the river, *commissaires* in turn summoned one of the 48 commissioners of the Châtelet to deal with cadavers and survivors. The commissioners returned most of the bodies to families and consigned the unclaimed ones to the morgue. They released most of the survivors to relatives, but transferred some to the hospital for further treatment and some to prison for their own safety. They recorded their observations and decisions in written reports, which have survived in four of the nine cases in 1779. The laconic registers of the 71 constables of the municipal watch, who patrolled the streets of the city to prevent or at least control disorder, include 10 other suicides (one intended, six attempted, and three completed) in the same year.⁸ The watch entrusted corpses to a commissioner on the spot and delivered survivors to a commissioner’s residence for disposition of their cases.

The *commissaires*, the watch, and the commissioners sometimes arrested men and women who tried to take their lives, if only to prevent them from trying again, but the magistrates never punished attempted suicide.⁹ By 1779, as a matter of fact, they no longer punished completed suicide. French law deprived individuals who killed themselves of their good name, property, and burial in consecrated ground and sentenced their bodies to be dragged through the street on a hurdle, hanged by the feet, and dumped in the refuse, unless they were out of their minds at the time. For that reason, friends, neighbours, and relatives deposed by the police routinely suggested that the dead were *non compos mentis*. Some victims left notes, but most did not, and none had the last word about their own deaths.¹⁰ The talkative “public” ventriloquized in *nouvelles* discussed motives, assessed conduct, and, more often than not, expressed pity. Unlike those who succeeded

5 Jeffrey Merrick, “Death and Life in the Archives: Patterns of and Attitudes to Suicide in Eighteenth-Century Paris” in David Wright and John Weaver, eds., *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 73–90, and “Suicide in Paris, 1775” in Jeffrey Watt, ed., *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 158–174. The reports on the cases are located in Archives Nationales [hereafter AN], Y13756, April 10, 1750, and Y11695, March 11, 1770. The girl was imprisoned for a month, as if to teach her a lesson, and then claimed by her parents. The woman was released into the custody of her husband.

6 In addition to the sources discussed in this paragraph, the guards who patrolled the Champs-Élysées reported four suicides over 13 years. Arlette Farge, ed., *Flagrants délits sur les Champs-Élysées : les Dossiers de police du gardien Federici (1777-1791)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2008), pp. 53, 254, 366, 375. The extant records of the guards who patrolled the Tuileries gardens include several cases in the last years of the Ancien Régime: AN, 013705 (Prévôté de l’hôtel).

7 AN, Z1H656. See Appendix 1. The full title of these officers is *huissier audencier et commissaire de police sur les quays de la ville de Paris*.

8 AN, Y10629-30. See Appendix 2. The watch found 33 corpses, mostly along the Seine, in the course of 1779.

9 Godineau, *S’abrégé les jours*, pp. 79–82.

10 On notes see *ibid.*, pp. 195–221.

in drowning, hanging, or shooting themselves, survivors could explain their own reasons and describe their own feelings, in defensive or defiant language. Some feared punishment and made excuses, but others still wished they were dead.

The Seine offered unhappy Parisians a simple way to kill themselves, day or night, without weapons, but drowning was not the most reliable method of committing suicide.¹¹ A disproportionate number of women attempted suicide in this way, and a disproportionate number of them survived, in some cases because of their buoyant clothing. More often than not, women as well as men retrieved from the river owed their lives to the *Établissement en faveur des noyés*, the rescue service created by the pharmacist and councilman Philippe Nicolas Pia (1721-1799) in 1772. Thanks to Pia, 15 guardposts along the river were equipped with lifesaving equipment, including smelling salts, camphorated brandy, and a “machine fumigatoire” for filling the rectum with tobacco smoke. Boatmen extracted most of the individuals from the water and delivered them to the nearest post, where trained guards administered assistance and notified one of the *commissaires*.¹² The rescue service provided rewards for boatmen and fees for guards and *commissaires*.¹³ A contemporary who alleged that municipal officials could not “négliger aucun des secours propres à conserver la vie aux citoyens” declared that “les soins qu’on prend pour rappeler les personnes noyées à la vie, méritent les plus grands éloges.”¹⁴ The eight reports published by Pia between 1772 and 1788, 1,636 pages in toto, suggest that guards and *commissaires* took their responsibilities conscientiously and deserved such praise.¹⁵

Pia did not count Parisians rescued by other personnel and did not break down the numbers into accidental and deliberate drownings, but he did specify that 65 individuals jumped, as opposed to fell, into the Seine. The survivors include 43 men and 22 women. The numbers and, more importantly, the percentages, are virtually identical with Hardy’s 42 male and 20 female suicides in the Seine. Pia provided the names of 53, the ages of 33, and details about the status of 40 individuals. The ages range from 14 to 89. The largest numbers are clustered in the teens (six) and twenties (seven) and in the forties (eight) and fifties (five). Three-quarters, more than in Hardy’s cases, did unskilled work. Men and women without resources tried to kill themselves in a way that did not require resources. The men include five servants, three journeymen, three wigmaker’s boys, two soldiers, two day labourers, a teacher, a secretary, a clerk, an engraver and a guardsman on duty along the river. The women include three servants, a musician, a cook, a seamstress,

11 Godineau, *S’abrégé les jours*, pp. 79-82.

12 The 1779 *Almanach royal* listed these names and addresses, all but one on or near the Seine: [Louis Noël] Blanchet, rue des Barres; [Jean François] Bega, [Jean] Balige, Blainville and Rathery, rue de la Mortellerie; Le Quin, place de Grève; Hoin, quai des Célestins; [Louis Adrien Joseph] Coutans, rue Pavée; [Charles Lucien] Gallé and Mangin, quai des Ormes.

13 Judging from the summary table in the records, the standard reward was 12 *livres*, more than many workmen earned per day. Total expenses per rescue ranged from 28 to 59 *livres*.

14 Nicolas Toussaint Lemoyne, dit Desessarts, *Dictionnaire universel de police*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1786-1790), vol. 7, p. 301. Desessarts acknowledged that he used material provided by Pia in the article “Noyés.”

15 Philippe Nicolas Pia, *Détail des succès de l’établissement que la ville de Paris a fait en faveur des personnes noyées* (Paris, 1773, 1774, 1775, 1776, 1777, 1779, 1782, 1788). The *Journal de Paris* featured the 1779 volume on the front page of its May 6 issue.

a laundress, and a flower-seller. Moving beyond demographic information, Pia identified the motives of 47 of the 65. Seven, including four women, had physical problems, and 14, including four women, had mental issues. Ten experienced “despair,” and two were tired of life. Marie Angélique Quatremains, age 24, told her mistress “que la vie lui étoit à charge, qu’elle avoit assez vécu, qu’elle a conçu le dessein de se noyer.”¹⁶ Ten had financial difficulties, and 12 had interpersonal troubles. A single woman, age 48, felt betrayed by a man who had expressed interest in her. A laundress could not endure her husband’s abuse, and a straw merchant could not endure his wife’s crossness. Two boys, ages 8½ and 15, feared beatings, and two girls, ages 17 and 19, were tired of severe treatment at home.¹⁷

Before they jumped, Antoine Broz gave his money to a stranger, and Jacques Bidalle made the sign of the cross. An unnamed man pulled his cap down over his eyes, and an unnamed woman tied her handkerchief over her face. After they jumped, Louis Nicolas Dubois and Marie Mauban had second thoughts and called for help, but several others resisted rescue. A few tried to jump back into the river, and more than a few lamented their failure to kill themselves. When a veteran from the Invalides regained consciousness in a guardhouse, “il entre en fureur, se débat en disant qu’il devoit être le maître de se noyer.”¹⁸ A secretary who jumped into the Seine at 3:00 p.m. vowed “qu’une autrefois il prendra mieux son temps, ou qu’il se détruira d’une autre manière.”¹⁹ He reportedly changed his mind after his recovery, but others did not. Hubert Gaspard “a témoigné du regret de n’être pas mort, & a déclaré qu’il ne lui restoit que l’idée qu’il avoit eu de se détruire, & qu’il persistoit dans les mêmes sentiments.”²⁰ Charles Griffon and Marie Françoise Delamarre used similar language. Jacques Crochet made the same threat and made good on it by tearing his wounds open in the hospital. Commissioners sent 24 of the survivors, including nine women, to the oldest and largest hospital in the capital, the Hôtel Dieu, where two of them died, and released 22, including 10 women, to relatives. They consigned six men and two women to prison. Two of the men, unclaimed by relatives, were later transferred to the hospital/prison of Bicêtre.²¹ Three others remained in custody because they seemed likely to attempt suicide again.²²

Pia collected material for his published reports from the unpublished reports of the *commissaires* (their reports on most of the cases in 1779 have survived) but did not have access to the unpublished reports of the commissioners (their reports on half of the cases in 1779 have survived). Reading the three sets of documents

16 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1776), p. 10.

17 It turned out that one of the boys was “un paresseux que son maître ne pouvoit déterminer au travail, & qu’il étoit souvent obligé de gourmander.” Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), p. 144.

18 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1779), p. 110.

19 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1777), p. 29. The cases in which Pia specified the time are almost evenly divided among morning, afternoon, and night hours.

20 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1779), p. 62.

21 Claude Collin, imprisoned in June 1774 and transferred on August 12, 1774, and Louis Nicolas Dubois, imprisoned on August 1 and transferred on September 10, 1778. The hospital/prison is located in the Parisian suburb of Kremlin-Bicêtre.

22 Since the registers of the Grand Châtelet and Petit Châtelet have not survived, it is impossible to determine how much time attempted suicides spent in custody.

side by side reveals more about Parisians who tried to drown themselves and about Pia's textual processes. His volume published in 1782 includes 12 suicides (11 attempted and one completed) in 1779, listed in Appendix 1. The three sets of documents include testimony from five of the survivors. Only one of them, Gaspard Bazon, age 40, an engraver, insisted "qu'il n'a jamais eu envie de se détruire." He assured *commissaire* Magan that he had jumped off the Pont de la Tournelle to retrieve his hat from the water and declared "que ce qu'il avoit fait ne regardoit que lui."²³ When commissioner Dupuy arrived, he changed his story. He acknowledged that "il a du chagrin, il n'est pas à son aise, il a peur de manquer d'ouvrage," but he regretted jumping into the river and causing a scandal.²⁴ Pia did not mention any of these comments.²⁵ Bazon seemed deranged, and so did Toussaint Hébert, age 26, a day labourer, who had fallen on a building site and spent four days in the Hôtel Dieu. He told *commissaire* Bega "qu'il avoit du chagrin" and "nous prioit de lui faire tirer un Coup de pistolet ou de le faire tuer," which convinced Bega that he was out of his mind.²⁶ Pia noted, incorrectly, that Hébert refused to give his name and requested, more bluntly, "qu'on lui brûle la cervelle d'un coup de pistolet."²⁷ The commissioners had both of these men hospitalized.

The other three cases involve domestic conflicts between parents and children or between spouses.²⁸ Anne Marguerite Ducy, age 19, a seamstress, told *commissaire* Blainville that her father was dead and her mother, Marie Françoise Sillet, would not feed or keep her unless she had work. After spending a week with a friend, she returned to her mother, who would not let her in. "Au desespoir" over her lack of work, she walked along the river for hours on July 6 and finally jumped, around 3:00 p.m., "pour mettre fin aux chagrins quelle avoit des Mauvais traitements de sa Mere."²⁹ When commissioner Chénon asked her how she had ended up in the river, however, Ducy denied that "chagrin" had prompted her to take a "parti violent" and maintained that she had fallen into the water accidentally. When Chénon asked her mother "si elle n'a pas donné à sa fille quelques sujets de mécontentement," Sillet denied responsibility.³⁰ Pia reported, or rather imagined, that Chénon urged her to treat the girl less harshly and warned her "qu'elle seroit responsable de ce qui par la suite pourroit arriver à sa fille."³¹

Three weeks later François Dupont, age 90, a retired master baker, removed his hat and coat and jumped into the Seine at 10:00 a.m. He did not like the taste of the camphorated brandy in the guardpost, but told the guards "que quand meme ce seroit du poison qu'il le prendroit," which suggested to them "que cet accident avoit été volontaire et pour se detruire." At first he told *commissaire* Hoin that

23 AN, Z1H656, December 12, 1789. The Pont de la Tournelle connects the Île Saint-Louis and the Left Bank. I am very grateful to Eric Albrand for photographing these reports and emailing them to me.

24 AN, Z1H656, December 12, 1779.

25 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), p. 92.

26 AN, Z1H656, October 12, 1779.

27 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), pp. 81-82.

28 On family conflicts see Godineau, *S'abrégé les jours*, pp. 133-44.

29 AN, Z1H656, July 6, 1779.

30 AN, Y11503, July 6, 1779.

31 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), pp. 68-70.

he had fallen into the water by mistake and, “ayant perdu la tete,” refused the pole extended to him by the boatmen, but then regained his senses. When Hoin asked why he had removed his hat and coat, Dupont asked to speak to him alone and confessed that he was “las de la vie,” so they had done him a disservice by rescuing him. “Il auroit été trop heureux s’il eut péri,” according to the report, because his daughter and son-in-law abused him and deprived him of necessities. He had surrendered his savings to them in return for room and board, but they complained “que ce vieux Bougre la ne crevera jamais que c’étoit parcequ’il ne pouvoit plus supporter ces mauvaises façons qu’il avoit pris la resolution de se détruire.”³² In Pia’s succinct but embellished account, “désespéré d’entendre ses enfans lui reprocher trop souvent sa longue vie, il prend le parti de la terminer en se noyant”³³ The *commissaire*’s report does not confirm that Dupont tried to jump back into the river, and the unnamed commissioner’s report, if it has survived, may or may not confirm that the children were reprimanded.

Last but not least, Geneviève Branlay, age 36, a laundress and wife of Jean Lievain, journeyman riverman, threw herself into the water at noon. She told *commissaire* Bega that Lievain was jealous, so they did not get along well, “au point que son mary l’a différentes fois maltraitée et battue.” She asserted that she had reported the repeated abuse to commissioner Thibert on several occasions.³⁴ “Désespérée de Son état, elle avoit pris la ferme resolution de se jeter a l’eau pour se détruire,” according to thereport. After “une querelle considerable” on the morning of June 13, she tried to execute that resolution. Branlay left their home, just a block from the Seine, and Lievain followed with a staff, “ce qui l’a décidée a se jeter a l’eau.” Whether she had decided to drown herself in advance or did so at the last minute, her husband rescued her, “malheureusement pour elle. Elle auroit désiré se noyer pour ne plus vivre avec lui.” For his part, Lievain described his wife as “une débauchée, libertine, menant une vie irreguliere,” who had sold or pawned many of their possessions. When he chastised her for her misconduct and administered marital “correction,” she threatened to stab him and hang their daughter.³⁵ When Thibert arrived, Branlay informed him, more specifically, that her husband “ne cesse depuis un tems infini de la maltraiter et de la traiter de coquine et de malheureuse l’accusant de vivre avec un grenadier et de lui avoir mangé cent pistoles depuis trois mois.” She had headed for the river “pour mettre fin a ses malheurs.” Lievain now admitted “qu’il a maltraité sa femme parce qu’elle est une gueuse et une coquine,” who had squandered 450 *livres* in four months. He did not know for sure why she sought the Seine but guessed it had something to do with his threat to strike her a hundred times if she did not find a missing shirt of his. The commissioner sent both of them to prison. He blamed Lievain

32 AN, Z1H656, July 29, 1779.

33 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), pp. 74-75.

34 His papers from 1778 and 1779 contain no such complaints. For patterns of domestic violence, see Jeffrey Merrick, *Order and Disorder under the Ancien Régime* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), chap. 9, and “Domestic Violence in Paris, 1775,” *Journal of Family History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (October 2012), pp. 417-427.

35 AN, Z1H656, June 13, 1779.

for the attempted suicide and feared Branlay might try again.³⁶ In Pia's dramatic narrative, Branlay, "désespérée par les mauvais traitements qu'elle éprouvoit de la part de son mari," filed a complaint against him and then, "animée par la démarche qu'elle vient de faire, & faisant réflexion sur les suites qu'elle pourroit entraîner, elle dirige ses pas vers la rivière."³⁷ No momentous quarrelling, just exaltation and apprehension, not mentioned by the *commissaire* or the commissioner, in the wake of her own exercise of agency in response to abuse. According to Pia, as opposed to Thibert himself, the commissioner imprisoned the spouses with the intention of interrogating them and adjudicating their disputes.³⁸

A modest number of Parisians who committed suicide composed letters or left notes in which they attempted to explain themselves and preclude other explanations for their despair and demise, but they could not control discussion of their motives and conduct after their deaths, in stairwells, markets, and taverns and in letters, journals, and *nouvelles*.³⁹ The remarkable testimonies analysed in the preceding paragraphs allow us not just to read the words of the dead but to hear the voices of live men and women who tried and failed to kill themselves, insofar as the clerks transcribed them accurately, and to study the ways in which Pia constructed their stories for publication. The archival documents provide a window into personal problems and domestic conflicts as well as relations between the populace and the authorities responsible for urban order. When questioned by *commissaires* and commissioners, individuals rescued from the river did not always know how to reply: straightforwardly, evasively, or dishonestly. Some had second thoughts about their words as well as their deeds. The modest sample of five cases include examples of consistency and inconsistency, denial followed by confession and confession followed by denial, desperation and lucidity, contrition and defiance. In digesting the reports of the *commissaires*, Pia transformed the prolix records of rescues into compact stories of success. He made mistakes, omitted details, added drama, and, of course, emphasized the efficacy of the service he had founded.

The reports of the *commissaires* from the years before and after 1779 have vanished, so it is not possible to read the 10 cases from that year as part of a longer series, but it is possible to supplement and juxtapose them with a larger body of sources from that year. The Lieutenant General of Police supposedly counted a hundred suicides in the just first four months of 1779.⁴⁰ The only way to locate most of those cases, of course, would be to search the papers of all 48 commissioners for deliberate rather than accidental deaths.⁴¹ The registers of the watch and Hardy's "Journal des événements" generally provide a shortcut to

36 AN, Y15865B, June 13, 1779.

37 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), pp. 63-65.

38 His papers from 1779 contain no other documents about this case.

39 For a case study, see Jeffrey Merrick, "'It is better to die': Abbé Rousseau and the Meanings of Suicide," forthcoming in *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques*, 2016.

40 BN, Hardy, "Mes loisirs," Fonds Français 6683, p. 149 (May 7, 1779).

41 The commissioners routinely questioned individuals rescued from the river about their "accidents." Commissioner Thibert asked Marie Claudine Thomas, 14½, "par quel hasard elle est tombée dans l'eau et si elle ne s'y est pas jeté dans l'intention de se détruire." She responded that "elle n'a point eu intention de se jeter à l'eau," and he concluded that "il ne nous a paru que ce soit aucuns chagrins qui l'y ait déterminé" (AN, Y15856A, May 7, 1779).

relevant documents, though not, unfortunately, in 1779. The watch named the commissioner in every case, but only four of the 10 reports about the suicides that were referred to commissioners in that year, listed in Appendix 2, have survived.⁴² The reports about Jean Baptiste Xavier Ponmaron, servant, and Daniel Fayel, journeyman pastry-maker, who wanted to drown themselves in April and July, respectively, are missing from commissioner Odent's papers. Hardy named commissioners in some but not all cases. He reported 18 suicides (four attempted and 14 completed) in 1779, listed in Appendix 3. The motives include illness, money, conflicts, madness, and "despair" for unknown reasons. Raffenot, who squandered large sums on gambling, shot his wife to prevent her from seeking a marital separation and stabbed himself to prevent the Swiss Guards from arresting him in the Luxembourg Garden.⁴³ After his mistress trampled the portrait he had painted of her, Villeneuve cut his throat and explained "que Jésus Christ étoit mort pour tous les hommes et que lui il avoit voulu mourir pour une femme."⁴⁴ The joiner who stood guard with a log outside his shop all night was not in his right mind, and neither was the bootblack who jumped from the scaffolding inside the church of Sainte-Genève, later the Panthéon, during noon mass.⁴⁵

Hardy reported three attempted and two completed suicides in the Seine in 1779. A woman "qui avoit probablement quelque motif de Chagrin et de Désespoir" jumped off the Pont Neuf on April 11. Hardy did not know much about "cet Evénement de la Nature de Ceux qu'on voyoit malheureusement se reproduire presque chaque Jour dans notre bonne mais trop grande ville."⁴⁶ A man who jumped into the river in Passy on July 10, "désespéré sans doute de l'État de détresse où il se trouvoit étoit surchargé d'Enfants et dans le Cas d'être prochainement arrêté pour débat de mois de nourrice."⁴⁷ Hardy recorded the third attempt, the only one documented by *commissaire*, commissioner, and Pia as well, on August 27. The four accounts are transcribed in Appendix 4. Hardy did not know the name or age of the clerk, Jean Baptiste François, age 40, or the cause of his despair, dissatisfaction with his old job in the administration of the tax on playing cards in Dauphiné and his new job as a member of the guard that staffed the barriers of the capital. According to *commissaire* Blanchet, he was

42 The jeweller Louis shot himself but did not kill himself. The watch delivered him to the nearest guardpost. The guard sent for a priest to administer the last rites and a surgeon to treat the injuries, as well as commissioner Foucault. He asked Louis "si c'est lui même qui s'est porté le coup," but the wounded man could not reply. After he recovered, Foucault sent him to prison (AN, Y13406, March 31, 1779). Abbé Jacques Guillaume Sallet, who wished to leave the clergy, tried to jump out the window. He rambled like a madman, and commissioner Ninin sent him to the hospital (AN, Y15082A, April 17, 1779). Gabriel Petit stabbed himself, chewed glass, and tried to jump out the window. Commissioner Notta sent him to prison (AN, Y12631, April 21, 1779). Last but not least, Jean Riquet hanged himself (AN, Y14694B, June 14, 1779).

43 This case is not documented in the extant records of the Prévôté de l'hôtel, AN, 013705.

44 BN, Hardy, "Mes loisirs," Fonds Français 6683, p. 227 (December 8, 1779).

45 He reportedly shouted, "Qu'il demandoit pardon à Dieu à la justice et à son prochain, sauve qui peut, malheureux qui est pris" or "Les rois font des hommes ce qu'ils veulent, Dieu fera de moi ce qu'il voudra, Bienheureuse Sainte Genevieve" or "Vive le Roi! Vive la Reine!" BN, Hardy, "Mes loisirs," Fonds Français 6683, p. 152 (May 16, 1779).

46 BN, Hardy, "Mes loisirs," Fonds Français 6683, p. 143 (April 11, 1779).

47 *Ibid.*, p. 169 (July 10, 1779).

jobless, penniless, deranged, and “mal avec sa mere et son frere.”⁴⁸ According to commissioner Foucart, who heard about the old job but not the new one, he was in despair “a cause des disgraces quil a Epruvé de la part de sa famille.” When he left the family home and moved into a furnished room, his mother retained his clothes and refused to provide financial assistance from her husband’s estate.⁴⁹ According to Pia, his relatives “réfusoient de lui fournir de l’argent pour vivre oisif parce qu’il avoit l’esprit aliéné.”⁵⁰ Hardy did not know much about this case, only what reached his shop on the rue Saint-Jacques, not too far from the Pont de la Tournelle. Yet he did know something that Blanchard, Foucart, and Pia did not, or at least did not state: that François, in black *veste* or *culotte* and stockings, with “yeux Egarés,” prowled the quays, cafés, and taverns, presumably in distress, before jumping into the water. As usual, Hardy tells us what others told him, not the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and yet provides an important supplement to the police reports. In this case, like so many others, multiple accounts complement each other and complicate the narrative. François changed his story, and so did those who recorded it, down to the question of when he regained consciousness, before or after he reached the guardpost.

To reconstruct patterns and meanings of suicide in eighteenth-century Paris, we need the “facts” from *commissaires* and commissioners, relatives, neighbours, and friends, but we also need the explanations and speculations circulated by “the public,” as recorded in other sources. The official documents are focused on methods, motives, and madness in separate cases; the more moralistic reports in letters, journals, and *nouvelles* reveal collective anxiety about the alleged “epidemic” of self-destruction in the 1770s. They often express sympathy for Parisians in despair and sometimes connect private tragedies with social conditions, as in this excerpt from the *Correspondance secrète, politique et littéraire*, dated March 13, 1779:

Nous avons eu dernièrement trois suicides dans un jour. Un homme a franchi le parapet du notre Pont neuf, ce qui a été pour lui le saut de vie à trépas; un autre est rentré dans son galetas avec les marques du désespoir; ses voisins ont entendu un coup de pistolet partir, ont accouru & ont trouvé le pauvre diable couvert des ombres de la mort. Ces deux malheureux obscurs n’étoient que des ouvriers qui peut-être n’ont pris ce genre de mort que par choix & qui ont été destinés à mourir de faim avant la fin du jour. Dans le temps même qu’ils terminoient ainsi leur tourmens, des débiteurs qui retenoient leur salaire & qui les avoient repoussés le matin, nageoient dans la joie, jouissoient de toous les plaisirs attachés à l’opulence insensible, & goûtoient avec délices des mets apprêtés par un cuisiner qui s’enrichissoit à leurs dépens.⁵¹

48 AN, Z1H656, August 27, 1779. Commissioner Foucault’s report on this case, unfortunately, is missing from his papers.

49 AN, Y13281B, August 27, 1779.

50 Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), p. 74.

51 *Correspondance secrète, politique et littéraire*, 18 vols. (London, 1787-1790), vol. 7, pp. 322-323 (March 13, 1779).

The same source published the farewell letter of a young woman seduced by a nobleman.⁵² Another source published the farewell letter of “le plus infortuné de tous les hommes,” aged 18, seduced by modern “philosophy.”⁵³ Contemporaries could read a strident defence of the traditional objections to and punishment of suicide in *Moyens propres à garantir les hommes du suicide* (Paris, 1779) by Dominican father Laliman.⁵⁴ He blamed the epidemic of self-destruction on irreligion and immorality and denounced both domestic “philosophy” and imported “Anglomania.”

Like many others, Laliman attributed the frequency of suicide across the Channel to climate, food, drink, and excessive liberty, including liberty of the press.⁵⁵ Charles Moore, who agreed with him about the dangers of incredulity, argued that self-murder was no more common among the English than among the French, “but that on account of the restraints on their press, particularly in the articles of their common newspapers, it is less diffused to public observation.”⁵⁶ One could pursue the topic in comparative perspective by studying accounts of English subjects who killed themselves in France and accounts of French subjects who killed themselves in England⁵⁷ or, more to the point here, by consulting the records of the Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned, founded by London doctors William Hawes (1736-1808) and Thomas Cogan (1736-1818) in 1774. The prospectus cited the success of rescue efforts in Paris and other cities across Europe.⁵⁸ Renamed the Humane Society and then the Royal Humane Society, this private organization established first-aid stations (“receiving houses”), trained volunteers, enrolled patrons, bestowed awards, sponsored sermons (including one by John Wesley),⁵⁹ and published reports, which include many types of “accidents,” not just drownings, and many cases from outside London. Scrutiny of these reports reveals some significant differences between the French and English accounts of attempted suicide. The more objective French ones document official questioning about name, age, status, and motive and

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337 (March 20, 1779).

53 Simon Nicolas Henri Linguet, *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires du dix-huitième siècle*, vol. 6 (1779), pp. 425-428.

54 The most substantial review appeared in Elie Catherine Fréron, *L'Année littéraire* (1780), vol. 4, pp. 108-124.

55 See Jeffrey Hopes, “‘La Maladie Anglaise’ in French 18th-Century Writing: From Stereotype to Individuation,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 109-132.

56 Charles Moore, *A Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide*, 2 vols. (London, 1790), vol. 1, p. 342. For examples of English newspaper coverage, see Mark Robson *et al.*, eds., *History of Suicide in England*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge, 2012), vol. 6.

57 To cite just one example, Charles Victor René de Maupeou (1749-1789), younger son of the notorious chancellor who executed Louis XV's suppression of the *parlements* in 1771, shot himself on English soil in 1789. According to the *Westminster Evening Post*, September 19-22, he scribbled these words: “I call to Heaven that I die innocent.” According to the *General Evening Post* of October 31 to November 3, he was reduced to misery by his father's avarice.

58 *Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned Instituted in 1774* (London, 1774). On Germany, see Alexander Kästner, “Saving Self-Murderers: Lifesaving Programs and the Treatment of Suicides in Late Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 46, no. 3 (Spring 2013), pp. 633-650.

59 John Wesley, *A Sermon, Preached November 23, 1777, in Lewisham Church, before the Humane Society* (London, 1777), including a paragraph, p. 20, on the “horrid crime” of self-murder.

official decisions about next steps. The more subjective English ones provide less information about persons and problems and more about treatment and outcome.

On June 8, 1777, a servant named Sarah Binder, ill and poor, "her distress of mind and body being too heavy to bear any longer, and not having the most distant prospect of better days," jumped into the Thames at Blackfriar's Bridge.⁶⁰ After she was rescued and revived, she "testifies the greatest sorrow and contrition for her fault and promises not to repeat the attempt."⁶¹ On July 28, 1783, another woman selected the same location to drown herself. By the next day it was reported that "the desponding woman is now with her husband, takes care of her family and continues in a serene state of mind."⁶² In 1787 the Society reported that it had helped survivors with money and clothing and "even reconciliation of parents and relatives." These fortunate individuals "have made no more such criminal attempts but on the contrary have proved themselves valuable members of the community and many of them have regularly attended the sermons occasionally preached in favor of this institution."⁶³ The Humane Society, like the rescue service in Paris, rewarded Good Samaritans who delivered bodies to first-aid stations. In London, at least, the rewards prompted "queer plungers" to jump into the Thames. Accomplices retrieved them and collected their guineas: "The supposed drowned person, pretending he was driven to that extremity by great necessity, is also frequently sent away with a contribution in his pocket."⁶⁴

Parisian sources do not document any such fraud or slang, which does not mean, as incautious contemporary analysts might have suggested, that ordinary Englishmen were more unscrupulous or enterprising than ordinary Frenchmen in the last decades of the Ancien Régime. The more telling difference in the rescues from the Thames and the Seine is the contrast between the private effort, with religious support and language, to save bodies and souls on one side of the Channel and the public effort, without religious agendas and overtones, to preserve lives on the other side. All of the English reform movements at the time involved individuals, Anglicans, Methodists, dissenters, and Quakers, with religious convictions and objectives, so it is not surprising that the Humane Society encouraged survivors to renounce suicide and celebrated their reintegration into family and parish. After decades of disputes over spiritual and temporal priorities and jurisdictions in France, the state exercised more control over education, health care, and poor relief, and its agents withdrew from enforcing standards of conduct defined by the clergy,⁶⁵ so it is not surprising that the rescue service sent two dozen survivors to the Hôtel Dieu but summoned a confessor in only one case. The *commissaires* and commissioners may or may not have reprimanded some heartless parents and

60 Opened in 1769. The current structure spans the river near the Inns of Court on the northern end and the Tate Modern on the southern end.

61 *Reports of the Humane Society Instituted in the Year 1774 for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned* (London, 1778), p. 8.

62 *Reports of the Humane Society* (London, 1785), p. 45.

63 *Reports of the Humane Society* (London, 1787), p. 6.

64 Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785), unpaginated. See also George Parker, *Life's Painter of Variegated Characters in Public and Private Life* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 165-168.

65 Jeffrey Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

children, but they recorded threats to attempt suicide again without reprimanding ungrateful Parisians who wished they were dead. Their mission was to save citizens from drowning, not to save Christians from damnation. Looking ahead, the National Assembly carried this trend in pre-Revolutionary jurisprudence to its logical conclusion, and resolved the tension between principles and practices, by decriminalizing suicide and other religious, moral, and sexual offences in 1791.

Returning to the river, Richard Cobb, who analysed the registers of the Paris morgue from the years before and after 1800, wrongly assumed that “drowning can witness for the general trend of suicide throughout the city.”⁶⁶ For one thing, the social profile of the victims is skewed, as demonstrated by the evidence from Pia’s reports and Hardy’s journal. Prosperous Parisians did not drown themselves. What is more, different types of sources provide different types of information about different types of suicides. The reports of rescues from the Seine, as opposed to the records of corpses in the morgue, let us hear the voices of ordinary people who attempted to take their own lives and study the ways in which their stories were written and rewritten in other types of texts. Parisian authorities and commentators regarded self-destruction as a personal tragedy of collective consequence because they thought some cases had social causes, most cases might prompt imitation, and all cases endangered population. They knew that it was more difficult to prevent suicide than to reduce infant mortality through the use of forceps or to combat smallpox through the practice of inoculation. At the same time, they also knew that it was more possible to remedy one type of attempted suicide, in the service of public welfare and in the spirit of benevolence, than it had been in the past.

⁶⁶ Richard Cobb, *Death in Paris: The Records of the Basse Geôle de la Seine, October 1795 – September 1804* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 4.

Appendix 1

Suicides in the Seine reported by Pia

Page	Date in 1779	Name	Commissaire	Commissioner (no report)	Outcome
154	June 10	Maréchal, barber and bootblack	Blanchet		Deceased
63	June 13	Geneviève Branlay, 36, laundress, in despair	Bega	Thibert	Imprisoned
68	July 6	Anne Marguerite Ducy, 19, seamstress, in despair	Blainville	Chénon	Released to mother
67	July 14	Léon Dupire, wigmaker's boy, drunk	Rathery	(Chénon)	Imprisoned
74	July 29	François Dupont, 89, retired master baker, in despair	Hoin	unnamed	Released to children
77	August 17	Girl, 15-16	Durochet		Released to parents
79	August 27	Jean Baptiste François, 40, deranged	Blanchet	Foucart	Released to parents
81	October 12	Toussaint Hébert, 26, day labourer, deranged	Bega	(Notta)	Hospitalized
82	October 13	François Gandelot, 69, soldier, distressed	Lequin	Michel ⁶⁷	Returned to Invalides
87	November 9	Marie Jeanne Mannoury, 39, deranged			Released to brother
92	December 12	Gaspard Bazon, 40, engraver, deranged	Magan	Dupuy	Hospitalized

⁶⁷ Michel asked Gandelot “pourquoi il s’est jete à l’eau et qu’elle est la raison qui l’a déterminé à le faire” (AN, Y14694^B, October 13, 1779).

Appendix 2

Suicides Recorded by the Watch

Date in 1779	Name	Commissioner (no report)	Outcome
March 31	Louis, jeweller, shot himself and survived	Foucault	Imprisoned
April 15	Jean Baptiste-Xavier Ponmaron, domestic, tried to jump into the Seine	(Odent)	Imprisoned
April 17	Jacques Guillaume Sallet, 26 or 27, abbé, deranged, tried to jump out window	Ninin	Hospitalized
April 21	Gabriel Petit, 31, journeyman jeweller, stabbed himself, chewed glass, and tried to jump out window	Notta	Imprisoned
May 20	Jean Baptiste Bauret, called Champagne, former domestic, tried to destroy himself	(Chénon)	Imprisoned
May 22	Françoise Chardet, tried to kill himself	(Odent)	Imprisoned
June 14	Jean Riquet, 60+, errand boy, hanged himself	Michel	Deceased
July 14	Daniel Fayel, journeyman pastry-maker, tried to jump into the Seine	(Odent)	Imprisoned
August 14	Barou, wine merchant, hanged himself	(Notta)	Deceased
August 30	Geroux, hanged himself	(Carlier)	Deceased

Appendix 3

Suicides Reported by Hardy

Page	Date in 1779	Name	Outcome
113	February 25	Vincent, 49, royal administrator, drowned	Deceased
118	March 3	Maurice de Saint-Leu, colonel, shot himself ⁶⁸	Deceased
188	March 3	Boneau, master joiner, shot himself ⁶⁹	Deceased
129	March 30	Matthieu François Pidansat de Mairobert, 60, nouvelliste, cut his veins and shot himself ⁷⁰	Deceased
134	April 11	Woman jumped into the Seine	Survived
145	April 30	Raffenot, 26-28, former clerk, stabbed himself	Deceased
149	May 7	Woman cut her throat	Deceased
151	May 16	Bootblack, 28, jumped from scaffolding ⁷¹	Deceased
169	July 10	Man jumped into the Seine	Survived
171	July 13	Man jumped out window	Deceased
173	July 16	Barkeeper shot himself	Deceased
177	July 29	Man jumped from Notre-Dame	Deceased
190	August 27	Man jumped into the Seine	Survived
202	October 2	Woman cut her throat	Deceased
210	October 19	Cook shot himself	Deceased
211	October 21	Dumas, 55, contractor, drowned	Deceased
214	November 5	Servant shot himself and survived	Imprisoned
227	December 8	Villeneuve, 29, cut his throat	Survived

68 Hardy named commissioner Gillet, so the report should be located in AN, Y13687. See also *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc.*, ed. Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-1882), vol. 12, pp. 393-394 (May 1780); *Correspondance secrète*, vol. 7, pp. 323-324 (March 13, 1779); *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république de lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours*, 36 vols. (London, 1780-1789), vol. 13, p. 303 (March 9, 1779) and p. 314 (March 14, 1779).

69 See also *Annales politiques*, vol. 5 (1779), pp. 417-418; *Correspondance secrète*, vol. 7, p. 371 (April 3, 1779) and p. 394 (April 20 1779); *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 14, pp. 9-10 (April 1, 1779), pp. 11-12 (April 3, 1779), pp. 108-109 (July 4, 1779); as well as Jeffrey Merrick, "Le Suicide de Pidansat de Mairobert," *XVIII^e siècle*, vol. 35 (2003), pp. 331-340, which includes commissioner Leseigneur's report. Since Mairobert killed himself in the Poitevin baths, moored in the Seine, *commissaire* Lequin preceded him to the scene (AN, Z'H656, March 30, 1779).

70 See also *Correspondance secrète*, vol. 8, p. 17 (May 10, 1779); Marie de Vichy Chamrond, marquise Du Deffand, to Horace Walpole, May 4, 1779, in *Correspondance complète avec ses amis*, ed. Mathurin François Adolphe de Lescure, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1865), vol. 2, p. 691.

71 Hardy named commissioner Lemaire, so the report should be located in Y13281^A.

Appendix 4

Attempted Suicide of Jean Baptiste François, August 27, 1779

Blanchet⁷²

L'an mil sept cent soixante dix neuf le vingt septième jour d'aout entre huit et neuf heures du soir, ayant été averti quil venoit detre repeché un particulier qui s'étoit jetté de dessus le pont de la tournelle dans la rivière. Nous nous sommes transportés au corps de garde du bout du pont de la tournelle ou led. particulier avoit été transporté ou nous avons trouvé un particulier revetu de la tunique et camisole de laine ayant sa connoissance.

Et le S. Laurent Regnaud caporal du poste de l'isle saint Louis nous a déclaré qu'ayant été averti ason poste qu'un particulier venoit de se jeter sur le pont, il s'est transporté avec sa section à labreuvoir de lisle saint Louis ou il a trouvé des bateliers qui avoient peché led. particulier et l'avoient mis dans leur bateau il y a fait entrer un de ses soldats et la fait conduire au corps de garde ou nous sommes pour lui faire administrer les secours necessaires et a signé.

Et le sieur Ozet sergent commandant lescouade dud. corps de garde, nous a déclaré que led. particulier etant sur la paillasse a été porté aud. corps de garde par ceux qui l'ont peché tant à la réquisition du caporal de lisle saint Louis qu'a la sienne ayant sorti avec son escouade a la clameur publique, et averti des mariniers de courir au secours, qu'a l'instant il la fait deshabiller a l'exception de sa culote la fait coucher sur lad. paillasse revetu de la camisole et du bonnet et lui a fait avaler de l'eau de vin camphrée et respirer de l'esprit volatil de sel ammoniac et n'a eu besoin d'autre secours et a signé.

Le nommé Edme Tulard gagne denier chez le S. Germain tapissier isle saint Louis nous a declare qu'etant a l'escalier des porteurs d'eau sur le quai Dauphin⁷³ il a vu tomber de dessus le parapet dans la rivière le particulier ci present qu'il a couru avertir des camarades quil est entré dans un bachot avec françois Nicolas Berton garçon de bateau a lessive du S. Saussaye. ils ont couru sur lui et lon joint à l'abreuvoir de lisle saint Louis parce quil avoit passé sous l'une des arches du Pont et lont peche dans leur bateau et passé aux ordres de la garde jusqu'au corps de garde ou nous sommes et a déclaré ne savoir signer.

Interrogé de ses noms, age, qualité et demeure, nous a repondu se nommer Jean Baptiste François agé de quarante ans fils de defunt S. françois procureur au parlement⁷⁴ dont la veuve sa mere demeure rue du four saint honoré⁷⁵ la premiere porte cochere a droite avec le S. françois procureur au chatelet⁷⁶ son frere que lui a été employé dans la Regie des cartes⁷⁷ en Dauphiné⁷⁸ est revenu a Paris au mois de novembre dernier et a eu un emploi de garde aux barrieres le vingt deux fevrier

⁷² AN, Z¹H656, pp. 79-80.

⁷³ On the southeast side of the Île Saint-Louis.

⁷⁴ Royal appeals court.

⁷⁵ Later rue Vauvilliers.

⁷⁶ Royal municipal court. The brother acquired the position of attorney in the Châtelet in 1776.

⁷⁷ Administration of the tax on playing cards.

⁷⁸ Province in southeastern France.

dernier en est sorti le vingt trois que mal avec sa mere et son frere et actuellement sans emploi il est allé loger en chambre garnie cul de sac du coq saint honoré⁷⁹ a vingt quatre sols⁸⁰ par jour et qu'enfin n'ayant plus d'argent et une seule chemise sur son corps quil a quité dimanche pour en prendre une que lui a prete un valet de chambre d'un seigneur quil a connu a Blois⁸¹ qui est celle quil avoit sur son corps il s'est livré au desespoir et s'est jetté par dessus le pont de la tournelle dans la riviere dou l'on l'a repêché et conduit au corps de garde ou Il a Eu des secours et comme nous avons reconnu par ces discours que cet homme avoit l'esprit aliéné nous avons envoyé chés le S. François procureur au chatelet son frere l'avertir de son etat et faire avertir pareillement un commissaire au chatelet de se transporter aud. corps de garde pour en prendre connoissance. est survenu M. Foucard commissaire au chatelet demeurant montagne sainte Genevieve⁸² lequel a remis led. particulier aux S. et demle. François ses frere et soeur demeurant ensemble avec leur mere chés le S. François procureur au chatelet lesquels survenus se sont chargés de le mener en avoir soin et le faire traiter et medicamenter et de remettre et renvoyer la chemise tunique et bonet de laine dont on l'avoit couvert a cause que ses hardes sont mouillées, et avons dressé le présent proces verbal quil ont signes en la minutte dont Expedition.

Foucart⁸³

L'an mil Sept Cent Soixante dix neuf Le Vendredy Vingt sept aoust neuf heures du soir Nous Gabriel Pierre foucart avocat en parlement Conseiller du Roy Commissaire au Chatelet de paris Sur L'avis qui nous a été donné par un des soldats de la garde de paris de poste a Lille St Louis quun particulier S'étoit Jetté dans la riviere par dessus le pont de la tournelle avoit été repeché aussitôt et Conduit dans le Corps de garde du quay quil Letoit en pleine Connoissance. Nous nous sommes sur le Champs transporté avec led Soldat dans led. Corps de garde du pont de la tournelle ou nous avons trouvé Monsieur Blanchet Commissaire de la Ville procedant a la redaction de son proces Verbal relatif a Cet Evenement Avons aussy trouvé Couché sur une paillasse Un particulier deshabillé, ayant toute Sa Connoissance et L'ayant Interpellé de nous declarer Ses noms et Surnoms age Qualités pays de Sa naissance et demeure Il nous a dit se nommer Jean Baptiste François agé de quarante ans anciennement employé de la regie des Cartes et actuellement sans Etat natif de paris y demt Rue de Sac du Cocq Chez un Limonadier dont Il ne sait le nom ou il est Logé depuis huit Jours a raison de Vingt quatre Sols par Jour.

Enquis de nous dire Si Cest Luy qui S'est Jetté dans la Riviere Et Ce qui la mis dans le Cas de se porter a Cette Extremitée.

Il nous a dit quil s'est Jetté de luy même par dessus Le pont de La tournelle de desespoir Et a cause des disgraces quil a Eprouvé de la part de sa famille

⁷⁹ Later rue Marengo.

⁸⁰ *Sol* or *sou*, coin worth 20 *deniers*.

⁸¹ City on the Loire river.

⁸² Hill on the Left Bank crowned by the Panthéon.

⁸³ AN, Y13281^B, August 27, 1779.

Enquis de nous dire quelles sont les disgraces dont Il entend parler

A dit que depuis Environ neuf mois quil a été supprime dans son employe aussy que plusieurs de Ses Confreres sa mere ne luy a donne aucun Secours quil a plaidé avec Elle par raison de la Succession de son pere Et quelle Lui retient actuellement ses habits Le Linge, et a signé

Si attendu Le flagrant delit nous avons ordonné quil en Sera par nous presentement Informé d'office a la requete de Me. Le proc du Roy⁸⁴ pour lad Information être Ordonné Cequil appartiendra et que notre presente ordonnance Sera executée nonobstant opposition ou appellation quelconques Et Sans y prejudicier et avons signé

En execution de laquelle ordonnance nous avons procede en lad Information et oui en Icelle les temoins presens Sous assignation Chacun Separément et en Secret ainsy quil suit

Francois Nicolas Breson, âgé de Vingt Cinq ans garçon de Batteau a Lessive a la pointe de Lille St Louis demeurant a la pointe de Lille paroisse St Louis⁸⁵ lequel apres serment par luy prete de dire et déposer Verite quil a déclaré nêtre parent allié Serviteur ny domestique des parties Lecture a luy faite du proces Verbal

Depose que sur les huit heures du soir Le noe. Toulon son Camarade est passé dans son Batteau et Luy a dit qu'un particulier Venoit de se Jetter dans La riviere par dessus le pont de la tournelle que Le deposant a detaché un petit Batelet et a Été a son Secours avec led toulon qu'ils Lont repeché Vivant vis a vis L'abreuvoir de Lille st. Louis, quil a rendu un peu d'Eau et LInstant dapres il est revenu en pleine Connoissance que La garde de Lille st Louis La fait transporter dans le Corps de Garde du pont de la tournelle pour luy procurer les secours dont il pouvoit avoir besoin qui est tout Ce quil a dit Scavoir Lecture a luy faite de sa deposition a dit Icelle Contenir Verité y a persisté a requis salaire a Luy taxé trente sols et a signé

Laurent Renaud âgé de quarante quatre ans Corporal de la garde de paris de poste a Lille Saint Louis demt petite Rue de Reuilly⁸⁶ paroisse ste. Margueritte⁸⁷ Lequel apres serment par luy prete de dire Verite quil a déclaré nêtre parent allié serviteur ny domestique des parties Lecture a luy fait dud proes verbal

Depose que sur les Cris publics Il s'est transporte a L'abreuvoir de Lille St. Louis ou Il a trouvé dans Un Batelet un particulier que lon Venoit de retirer de la riviere, quil La fait transporter Sur Un Brancard dans le Corps de garde du pont de la tournelle ou il est revenu en un peu de temps au moyen des secours qu'on luy a apporté en pleine Connoissance, qu'il a envoyé un soldat de sa section nous donner avis de Cet événement qui est tout Ce quil a dit Scavoir Lecture a luy faite de sa deposition a dit Icelle Contenir Verité y a persisté a requis salaire a luy taxé trente sols et a signe

Jean Come tulon gagne denier âgé de trente trois ans passés demt. a Paris Ruë Ille et paroisse st. Louis Lequel après serment par lui preté de dire Verité quil a

⁸⁴ Jacques Moreau de la Vigerie, rue de l'Egout, procureur du roi since 1740.

⁸⁵ The parish church is located at 19 rue St-Louis en l'Ile, in the 4th arrondissement.

⁸⁶ Later rue Erard.

⁸⁷ The parish church is located at 36 rue Saintt-Bernard, in the 11th arrondissement.

declaré netre parent allié serviteur ny domestique des parties Lecture a lui faite du proces verbal

Depose que Sur les huit heures du soir tout au haut de L'escalier des porteurs d'eau sur le quay dauphin Il a Vu tomber de dessus le parapet du pont de la tournelle dans la Riviere Un particulier, que le deposant est Couru a L'instant au Batteau a Lessive Joindre Le noe. Breton quil sont allé ensemble avec Le Bateau de leur Maitre au secours dud particulier Et L'ont repeché vers l'abreuvoir de Lille St. Louis et mis dans ledit bachaut que peu de temps apres il a repris ses sens et Leur a parle que La garde etant survenu Ils l'ont transporté dans le Corps de garde du pont de la tournelle ou on luy a administré tous les secours que Son Etat exigeoit qui est tout Ce quil a dit Scavoir lecture a lui faite de sa deposition a dit Icelle Contenir Verité y a persisté et requis salaire a lui taxé trente sols et a déclaré ne scavoir Ecrire ny signer a ce Interpellé suivant l'ordonnance.

Antoine Ozet agé de Cinquante huit ans sergent de la garde des ports de poste au pont de la tournelle demt. Ruë et paroisse St. Jacques du haut pas⁸⁸ Lequel apres serment par lui preté de dire Vérité quil a déclaré netre parent allié serviteur ny domestique des parties Lecture a luy faite dud proces verbal

Depose que sur les huit heures du soir Il sest Transporté la la Clameur publique avec son Escouade a la pointe de Lille st. Louis ou on luy a dit quon Venoit de pecher un particulier qu'a son arrivé Il y a trouve la garde de paris, que led Led particulier étoit dans un Batteau, qu'ils L'ont fait porter dans son Corps de garde ou il a reçu tous les secours Convenables a son Etat et a recouvert tout Son bon sens qui est tout Ce qu'il a dit scavoir Lecture a luy faite de sa deposition a dit Icelle Contenir Verité y a persisté a requis salaire a lui taxé trente sols et a Signé

Ce fait avons fait fouiller dans les poches dud françois dans lesquelles S'est trouvée une Commission delivré pardit françois par le sr Delaitre Le Vingt Deux fevrier mil sept cent soixante dix neuf pour Les entrées de la Ville de paris se sont aussi trouves differents papiers tel quétat Memoire et Lettres de famille. Et deux sols dans laquelle de sa Culotte

A L'Instant sont survenus Abraham Jacques françois Bourgeois de paris demeurant Chez le sieur françois Procureur au Chatelet Son frere

Et Demoiselle Catherine françois fille majeur demeurant Chez Led sr françois Son frere Rue du four St. honoré paroisse Saint Eustache

Lesquels nous ont dit que sur L'avis qui Vient de leur être donné de notre part que Le nommé Jean Baptiste françois leur frere Setoit Jetté dans La Riviere par dessus du parapet du pont de La tournelle quil avoit ete repeché et transporté dans le Corps de garde dudit pont de la tournelle Ils sy Sont rendus pour s'assurer du fait Le reconnoitre et Le reclamer, que Ledit particulier Cy present retiré de L'eau est Effectivement Leur frere quil demeuroit depuis Le mois de novembre dernier Chez led sr. françois Procureur au Chatelet Leur frere, que depuis quelques temps ils se sont appercus quil avoit Lesprit derangé quil a quitté depuis quinze jours a Leur Inscu la maison de leur frere, qu'ils requierent que Leur frere leur Soit

⁸⁸ The parish church is located at 252 rue Saint-Jacques, in the 5th arrondissement.

Remis aux offres qu'ils font de S'en Charger pour le représenter Sil est ainsi ordonné quand et à qui Il appartiendra Et ont signé.

Avons de Ce que dessus donné acte auxd. sr. et demoiselle François Et à leur requisition nous leur avons Remis Led Jean Baptiste François leur frère dont Ils se sont Conjointement Chargés pour le représenter Quand et à qui Il appartiendra Au moyen dequoy Led Renaud Caporal de la garde est demeuré déchargé

Dont et de ce que dessus avons fait et dressé le présent procès Verbal pour servir et Valoir Ce que de raison qui a été signé desd. sr. et dlle François et de nous comme

Hardy⁸⁹

Entre neuf et dix heures du soir, un Particulier dont on ne disoit ni le nom ni l'âge, mais qu'on prétendoit être un Commis de la ferme des Cartes supprimée,⁹⁰ vêtu d'une veste, Culotte et bas noirs, se précipite Pardessus la Parapette, du milieu du Pont de la Tournelle dans la Rivière et est fort heureusement retiré de l'Eau par un Pêcheur vers le Jardin du Terrain⁹¹ et transporté bien vivant au Corps de Garde où on lui administre sur le Champs les secours Etablis pour les Noyés qui produisent tout leur Effet, après quoi on s'assure de sa Personne et l'on avertit sa famille. on Entendoit dire qu'il avoit un frère Procureur au Châtelet; Comme aussi qu'il avoit été vû dans l'après midi du même Jour ayant les yeux Egarés rôder sur les Quays de l'Isle Saint Louis et en parcourir les Caffés et les Cabarets.

Pia⁹²

Jean-Baptiste François, âgé de 40 ans, dégoûté d'en emploi qu'il avoit dans la Régie des Cartes en Dauphiné, & ne voulant pas exercer celui de Garde aux Barrières de Paris qu'on lui proposoit; mécontent d'ailleurs de ses parents qui refusoient de lui fournir de l'argent pour vivre oisif parce qu'il avoit l'esprit aliéné, il cherche à se soustraire à la vie; en conséquence il se précipite dans la rivière par-dessus le Pont de la Tournelle du côté d'amont; le nommé Edme Tulon gagnedenier, qui étoit alors au haut de l'escalier des Porteurs d'eau, quai Dauphin, ayant entendu le bruit de la chute de François dans l'eau, & le voyant flotter, en donne avis au Garçon des bateaux à Lessive du sieur Saussie, ils entrent tous deux dans un bachot pour courir à force de rames sur ledit François, mais ils ne peuvent le joindre que vers l'abbreuvoir du quai d'Orléans,⁹³ c'est-à-dire à environ cent toises au-dessous de l'endroit où il étoit tombé; il étoit sans connoissance & ne donnoit aucun signe de vie lorsqu'ils l'ont repêché & mis dans leur bachot; en cet état on le porte au Corps-de Garde de la Tournelle, où Me Blanchet, Commissaire de la Ville, particulièrement chargé du district des Noyés a présidé avec toute l'intelligence & la capacité qu'on lui connoît à l'administration des secours, qui lui ont été donnés avec un tel succès qu'en moins de deux heures il a été en état d'être rendu à ses parents qui étoient venus pour le réclamer.

⁸⁹ BN, Hardy, "Mes Loisirs," Fonds Français 6683, p. 190.

⁹⁰ Comptroller general Turgot (1774-1776) consolidated many separate tax administrations into one.

⁹¹ At the end of the Île de la Cité, behind the archbishop's palace.

⁹² Pia, *Détail des succès* (1782), pp. 79-80.

⁹³ On the southwest side of the Île Saint-Louis, across from Notre-Dame.